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**ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN ASHCROFT UNVEILS
INTERNATIONAL DRUG KINGPIN STRIKE FORCE
IN MANHATTAN**

Attorney General JOHN ASHCROFT announced today the opening of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("OCDETF") Strike Force in Manhattan dedicated to identifying, targeting, and dismantling the world's most sophisticated and powerful narcotics trafficking organizations. The OCDETF Strike Force will consist of more than 200 law enforcement officers from nine different federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies as part of an effort to bring the combined resources and talents of the participating agencies to bear against the largest suppliers of illegal drugs to the United States. Attorney General ASHCROFT was joined today at the OCDETF Strike Force ribbon cutting by a number of other high level federal, state, and local law enforcement officials.

In 2003, Attorney General ASHCROFT boldly challenged law enforcement agencies to collaboratively develop a unified national list of the most significant international narcotics trafficking organizations responsible for the U.S. drug supply.

The resulting "Consolidated Priority Organization Target" or "CPOT" list has since become the centerpiece of the nation's anti-drug strategy. The OCDETF Strike Force announced today will be charged with the task of dismantling CPOTs and their affiliated organizations within the New York Metropolitan area.

At a recent conference celebrating OCDETF's 20th anniversary, Attorney General ASHCROFT called upon the nation's law enforcement community to act decisively in developing strategies designed to target and dismantle the world's most sophisticated narcotics trafficking organizations. As Attorney General ASHCROFT noted: "The single, great idea of OCDETF was to bring together the expertise of various federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to target entire networks of organized drug traffickers" Attorney General ASHCROFT encouraged law enforcement agencies to combine their resources in co-located task forces in order "to cripple and ultimately dismantle major drug trafficking organizations, root and branch." The OCDETF Strike Force unveiled today realizes Attorney General ASHCROFT's vision.

Recognizing that experienced prosecutors are critical to supporting investigations of sophisticated international organized crime syndicates, the OCDETF Strike Force will work closely with federal prosecutors from the United States Attorney's Offices for the Southern and Eastern Districts of New

York. In order to ensure that these OCDETF attorneys will provide legal advice and case support throughout the investigation, two Lead OCDETF Strike Force Attorneys from the Southern and Eastern Districts of New York will be permanently assigned to the Strike Force. In addition, in appropriate cases, Strike Force law enforcement officers will work with the New York City District Attorneys Offices and the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York.

The OCDETF Strike Force was originally made possible by a \$2.4 million grant from the Office of National Drug Control Policy in November 2002. This grant covered expenses for the original build out and construction on the space, as well as ongoing infrastructure such as computers, telephone service and rental vehicles for state and local police officers assigned to the Strike Force. The Department of Justice through the OCDETF program will pay the full cost of the salaries for all of the 170 federal investigators and prosecutors and the overtime expenses for the more than 40 state and local law enforcement officials assigned to the Strike Force. In addition, OCDETF funds will be used to pay the day to day operating expenses for items such as investigative travel, purchase of evidence, and informants. The New York State Police (the "NYSP") made the Strike Force possible by signing a 10-year lease for the state of the art facility in Manhattan. Pursuant to a memorandum of agreement, the Strike

Force will repay the NYSP for the rent (approximately \$2.2 million per year) from drug traffickers' assets that are seized and forfeited by the Strike Force.

To that end, Attorney General ASHCROFT announced that a portion of \$20 million in Colombian drug money successfully forfeited by members of the OCDETF Strike Force in Operations White Dollar and Green Dollar -- the Strike Force's first investigation that led to the May 3, 2004 coordinated dismantling of a 34 member money laundering ring responsible for moving millions of Colombian cartel drug dollars in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom -- would be directed towards repaying the NYSP for the Strike Force's first year of rent in Manhattan. The Strike Force will continue to use the forfeited funds of the international narcotics trafficking organizations it dismantles to finance its mission.

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